

the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The Senator from Arizona.

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION

### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. KELLY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

### TRIBUTE TO LOURDES E. "ALFIE" ALVARADO-RAMOS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise today to celebrate Alfie Alvarado-Ramos, the Director of Washington State's Department of Veterans Affairs, who will retire on January 31, 2023, after serving Washington State and our veterans for over 29 years. Alfie's impressive career is marked by many well-earned accolades, but most of all by her dedication to serving Washington State and the Nation.

Throughout her military service, Alfie's service has been recognized with awards and decorations, including the Legion of Merit, Order of Military Medical Merit, Expert Field Medical Badge, and Meritorious Service medal. After 22 years, she retired from Active Duty in August 1993 as the command sergeant major of Madigan Army Medical Center and Troop Command, Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

She has also proven herself a distinguished and passionate leader in the management of medical services delivery and human resources management, especially for our veterans. Alfie is an alumna of the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government Executive Program, the University of Washington Executive Management Program, and holds a master's degree in healthcare administration, and a licensed nursing home administrator.

As director of Washington State's Department of Veterans Affairs, Alfie was a member of Governor Jay Inslee's executive cabinet and chaired the Washington State Military Transition Council. In this capacity, she has helped the agency lead statewide efforts for the seamless transition of servicemembers and their families to Washington State's communities. As a leader in our State, she has been honored with many well-earned local, State, and national awards, including the Governor's Distinguished Management Leadership Award and the Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary's Leadership Award.

Alfie's extraordinary commitment to servicemembers and veterans is unmatched. Anyone who has worked with Alfie, as I have been honored to do for

many years, knows her tireless dedication and relentless drive to improve services for members of the military, veterans, and their families. From mental health to education and training, military spouse employment, to emergency funding for State veterans homes in the depths of the COVID pandemic, Alfie has been an incredible partner.

Although there are so many stories I could share about the way Alfie has fought for veterans in Washington State, there is one in particular that I will never forget. Back in 2013, the State of Washington, thanks to Alfie's leadership, secured Federal funding for a veterans home in Walla Walla. Unfortunately, through a series of bureaucratic mishaps, our State was in danger of losing that funding—that is, until Alfie stepped in. She called to let my office know about the problem and was absolutely furious the Federal Government would pull the rug out from under those veterans who needed care the most. I couldn't have agreed more. It was unacceptable—so we didn't accept it. Together, we fought to keep the funding, and we won. There is now a beautiful veterans home in Walla Walla thanks to Alfie's tireless dedication to Washington State veterans.

I will miss working with her in the years ahead, but it has been an honor to know Alfie throughout her career as dedicated mentor, teacher, and guide for the next generation of military and veteran leaders. I know Washington State and the Nation will be in good hands, thanks to her and her legacy will continue far beyond her own retirement.

I offer my deepest appreciation for Alfie's dedicated service to the United States of America and Washington State. I ask that my colleagues join me in congratulating Alfie on her well-earned retirement and wishing her many years of enjoyment with her family.

### REMEMBERING ROBERT "BOBBY" SILVERSTEIN

Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize and honor the life of Robert "Bobby" Silverstein, who was a champion for people who experience disabilities and who made an incredible impact throughout his career.

During his time working for both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, Bobby held a number of leadership roles where he helped develop legislation to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities. This includes serving as staff director and chief counsel for the Subcommittee on Disability Policy on what is now known as the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. During his tenure, Bobby worked to build bipartisan consensus and helped negotiate critical pieces of bipartisan legislation, including the Americans with Disabilities Act—ADA.

Bobby made a profound impact on countless families across the country,

including my own. My son Ben experiences physical disabilities and because advocates like Bobby worked to pass critical legislation like the ADA, Ben had the opportunity to go to school, to learn, and make friends in our community.

But my family's story is not unique. Across the country, in the more than three decades since the ADA was signed into law, people who experience disabilities have been more fully included in their communities and have received the support that they need to thrive at home, in school, at work, and in all aspects of their lives.

As we mark Bobby's legacy, we also recognize that we have more work to do to build on his incredible efforts. And we must follow his example of working to build consensus and make a difference for the American people.

While Bobby passed away in November, the impact that he has made in the lives of millions of people will live on in our democracy. I am profoundly grateful for the work he has done and will continue working to honor his legacy and ensure that Americans who experience disabilities are fully included in every aspect of our society.

### TRIBUTE TO CHERYL L. MASON

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, today I would like to honor the 30 years of public service and career of a distinguished American and champion for veterans, servicemembers, and their families: Mrs. Cheryl L. Mason.

As the Department of Veterans Affairs' Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals, Chairman Mason helped deliver thousands of veterans and their families appeals on their earned benefits and VA services, ensuring they received timely decisions, including throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chairman Mason's lifelong commitment to serving veterans, servicemembers, and their families is no surprise given her background. She is the daughter of a U.S. Navy World War II veteran and a proud military spouse, serving her country alongside her husband Brett during his nearly 21 years in the U.S. Air Force.

Like many military spouses, Chairman Mason experienced a few breaks in her professional career due to relocations. However, she never let that stop her from working, whether it was as an LBJ intern on Capitol Hill for Congressman Bob McEwen, for the Department of the Air Force, in academia, or in private practice as an attorney. In fact, her experience served as a catalyst for her to become a champion for the military spouse community, where she went on to assist VA, the Department of Labor, Defense, and the Hiring Our Hero's Program at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to reduce military spouse unemployment and underemployment.

After decades of public service, Mrs. Mason was confirmed by the U.S. Senate and sworn-in as the Chairman of

the Board of Veterans' Appeals in November of 2017. She is the first woman and military spouse to hold this position.

During her time as Chairman, Mason demonstrated strong leadership to the veterans and communities she served. From hiring 65 new veterans law judges to increase both hearing and decision capacity, to expanding use of remote work during the pandemic that resulted in record-setting hearings, she delivered on her commitments.

As the top Democrat on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee since 2017, it was a great honor to work with Chairman Mason and the Board of Veterans' Appeals to spearhead landmark laws such as the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act, which reduced the claims backlog from 472,000 cases to 96,000 cases in 4 years, and the VA Tele-Hearing Modernization Act, which VA was able to quickly implement as a result of Chairman Mason's efforts.

Cheryl has also been an outstanding champion for the hiring of veterans, military spouses, and caregivers at VA and in the executive branch. And as a PREVENTS ambassador, she has done great work in developing and distributing a holistic public health approach to suicide prevention, working locally and nationally to end suicide.

It is my honor to recognize Cheryl's 30 years of outstanding service and top-notch commitment to serving our military men and women, veterans, and their families. While Cheryl is beginning a new chapter, I have no doubt she will continue to serve as a leading national advocate.

Chairman Mason, on behalf of myself and a grateful nation, I extend my greatest appreciation to you for your enduring leadership, advocacy, and service to all veterans. Your impact will be felt by veterans nationwide for years to come. Thank you.

#### TRIBUTE TO VICTORIA LONG RUBIN

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize Mrs. Victoria Long Rubin, a Knauss Sea Grant fellow on the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

Mrs. Ruben's scientific expertise has informed the committee's efforts in a meaningful and professional way. She has worked on several pieces of legislation that are important to improve the safety and economic security of the Nation, including the TORNADO Act, the Maritime Technical Advancement Act, and the first authorization of the Minority Business Development Agency. Her contributions will help improve tornado forecasting to keep Americans safer from deadly storms, promote maritime education at our Nation's community colleges, and increase support for rural minority businesses.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Mrs. Rubin for all of the fine work she has done and wish her luck in the years to come.

#### TRIBUTE TO ASHLYN SPECTOR

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize Ms. Ashlyn Spector, a Knauss Sea Grant fellow on the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

Ms. Spector's scientific expertise has informed the committee's efforts in a meaningful and professional way. She has worked on several pieces of legislation that are important to improve the safety and economic security of the Nation, including the TORNADO Act. Her contributions will help improve data management at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, promote Federal partnerships with our Nation's historically black colleges and universities and increase Federal coordination on floods and wildfires.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Ms. Spector for all of the fine work she has done and wish her luck in the years to come.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### RECOGNIZING THE 1973 VASTER HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL TEAM

• Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the 1973 Vaster High School basketball team on the 50th anniversary of its overall state championship game performance and the way it continues to inspire many Arkansans to this day.

From the small, rural Jefferson County community of Moscow, and with a first-year head coach, the Vaster basketball team had a remarkable season, earning the Class B title and advancing to the finals in the overall tournament. Vaster defeated bigger and better teams to earn the right to play in the overall championship contest against the powerhouse players of Little Rock Central High School.

The Vaster squad was certainly the underdog, but they played hard and kept the game close through late in the fourth quarter. In the final moments, they came up short, but despite the crushing defeat, the Vaster players held their heads high and fans rallied around these young men who proudly represented their community. They revealed wisdom beyond their years in learning from the loss, taking pride in all they had achieved and still displaying true sportsmanship.

Stories like theirs bring communities together and create memories and friendships that last a lifetime. Their performance at the end of the 1973 season has forged a bond between the players, coaches, and spectators that still sparks passion today.

I applaud the coaches and players for their ability to show such grit and resilience on the court and grace in defeat. By overcoming challenges they faced along their hard-fought journey, the Vaster team demonstrated the power of uniting to achieve a common goal. Even 50 years later, this game represents something bigger than just

basketball in the lesson it provides—anyone can face long odds, and even suffer a defeat, but still be considered a winner.●

##### RECOGNIZING THE 1973 VASTER MEN'S BASKETBALL TEAM

• Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, in the past half century, Arkansans have played millions of basketball games, most of which have disappeared into a blur of fond memories and forgotten scores. For many of the residents of Jefferson County, however, one game still stands out from the rest: the 1973 State overall championship final between the Vaster High School Pirates and the Little Rock Central High School Tigers.

In that game, the Pirates represented a small rural community of only a few hundred, against the Tigers of Little Rock, a city of a quarter million. The Tigers were taller, better ranked, and were defending champs. Vaster, on the other hand, had overcome great odds just to get to the championship final, and few thought they had a chance. The Pirates could have made a half-hearted effort that March day and met expectations. But that is not what makes a great game and not what the Pirates had in mind.

When they took the court, Vaster's coaches and players were intent on shattering expectations, and that is exactly what they did. Far from being blown out, the Pirates went toe-to-toe with the Tigers. Central would take the lead, only for Vaster to wrest it away. The Pirates made the Tigers fight for every pass, point, and inch of progress. And you better believe they made Central sweat. This climactic battle between two great teams ended in a one-point Tiger victory, after Vaster missed a free throw in the last 12 seconds of the game.

Fifty years later, that game still fills many Arkansans with pride. It remains proof that extraordinary effort, commitment, and drive, even by teenagers on a basketball court, can inspire and make a difference years later. That is why I would like to honor the great coaches, players, and staff of the 1972-73 Vaster High School Pirates: head coach Herbert Pryor, assistant coach Andrew Carr, Cleveland Allen, Eric Biley, Samuel Biley, Jr., Reddic Borkins, Jimmy Dade, Carl Evans, James Evans, Tommy Evans, Roy Franklin, Jimmy Gladney, Homer Jackson, Melvin Jackson, Charles Petty, Rodney Ryce, Thomas Tarty, Ronnie Grice, Rodney Crawford, and Jacob Jones.

The State of Arkansas and the U.S. Senate salute you on this 50th anniversary of your great game.●

##### REMEMBERING JAMES "JIMMY" DEAL

• Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, today I rise to recognize the life and legacy of my dear friend, James